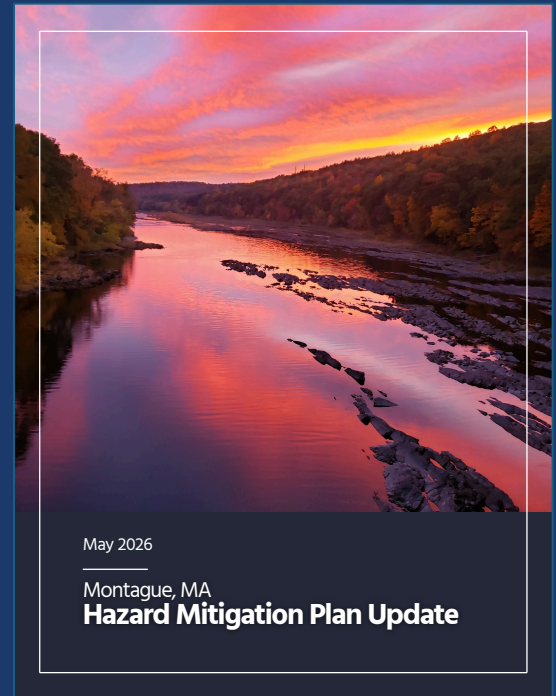


TOWN OF MONTAGUE
Massachusetts

2026 Hazard Mitigation Plan Update

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



About This Document

This Executive Summary presents the key findings and priorities of the Town of Montague's 2026 Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP) Update. The full plan provides a comprehensive framework to reduce long-term risks to life and property from natural hazards — ensuring Montague remains prepared, resilient, and eligible for federal hazard mitigation grants through FEMA.

What's Inside

- Planning Process & Community Engagement
- Hazard Identification & Risk Assessment
- Capability Assessment
- Mitigation Goals & Prioritized Actions
- Plan Implementation & Maintenance

**Submit to Massachusetts Emergency
Management Agency and Federal
Emergency Management Agency for
Review**

June 2026

Lead Agency

Town of Montague Planning Department

OVERVIEW & PURPOSE

The Town of Montague's 2026 Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP) Update provides a comprehensive, FEMA-compliant framework to reduce or eliminate long-term risk to human life and property from natural hazards. Updating the previous 2020 plan ensures Montague remains eligible for FEMA Hazard Mitigation Assistance grant programs and reflects the community's evolving priorities, including a growing emphasis on climate-ready infrastructure and downtown revitalization.

Hazard Mitigation Plans are a federal requirement under the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000. By maintaining an approved plan, Montague can access pre-disaster grant funding to proactively address vulnerabilities — reducing the cost and disruption of future disasters before they occur.

PLANNING PROCESS & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The plan was developed through a structured, inclusive planning process led by a 19-member Hazard Mitigation Planning Committee (HMPC) representing diverse community stakeholders:

- Town officials and department heads
- Fire, Police, and Emergency Management personnel
- FirstLight Power (operator of local hydroelectric dams)
- Montague Community Resource Center and social service agencies
- Representatives from Montague's five villages: Montague Center, Turners Falls, Millers Falls, Montague City, and Lake Pleasant

Public outreach included virtual and in-person public meetings, an online comment period, and targeted engagement with neighboring communities and vulnerable populations, including non-English-speaking residents and unhoused individuals living along the Connecticut River. The planning process also incorporated extensive review of current climate science, including the 2022 Massachusetts Climate Change Assessment and the 2023 ResilientMass Plan.

HAZARD IDENTIFICATION & RISK ASSESSMENT

The HMPC evaluated 13 specific hazards, assessing each based on probability of occurrence, potential impact, geographic extent, warning time, and event duration. Climate change projections were integrated throughout to account for worsening conditions over the plan's five-year horizon.

Risk Level	Hazards
HIGH	Flooding from Precipitation • Severe Winter Storms • Extreme Temperatures • Severe Weather Events
MODERATE	Wildfire/Brushfire • Hurricanes/Tropical Storms • Drought • Dam Failure Flooding • Tornadoes • Hazardous Material Incidents • Invasive Species • Landslides
LOW	Earthquakes

The risk assessment identified several interconnected vulnerabilities specific to Montague:

- Approximately 52 buildings lie within the Special Flood Hazard Area, including the Hillcrest School
- Critical bridges and culverts serving as evacuation routes are susceptible to washout during heavy precipitation events
- Combined Sewer Overflows (CSOs) release untreated sewage into local waterways during intense storms
- Multiple high-hazard dams upstream on the Connecticut and Deerfield Rivers pose inundation risk to the Town Hall, Police Department, Farren Care Facility, and historic mill buildings in Turners Falls
- The Montague Plains — a rare pitch-pine scrub-oak barren — presents significant wildfire risk to adjacent neighborhoods due to decades of accumulated fuels
- Abandoned and blighted mill properties along the Connecticut River contain legacy contamination that could be released during flood events
- Elderly residents, non-English speakers, and unhoused populations face heightened vulnerability during rapid-onset emergencies

CAPABILITY ASSESSMENT

Montague demonstrates strong foundational capacity to implement hazard mitigation measures. The Town's 2024 Comprehensive Plan explicitly integrates climate resilience into all levels of local planning and decision-making. Active regulatory tools include zoning bylaws, subdivision regulations, and stormwater management requirements.

Key Opportunities to Strengthen Local Capacity

- Formally designate a local Floodplain Administrator to ensure consistent NFIP compliance
- Update the 2015 Community Wildfire Protection Plan to provide town-wide coverage
- Build in-house GIS capabilities for improved hazard mapping and spatial analysis
- Increase staff capacity and grant-writing resources to pursue available federal funding

MITIGATION GOALS & PRIORITIZED ACTIONS

The HMPC established six broad goals to guide the Town's mitigation efforts over the next five years. These goals reflect both immediate safety priorities and the long-term vision for a climate-resilient Montague.

Goal 1: Save Lives and Reduce Losses to Private Property

Focus on protecting residents — particularly vulnerable populations — from the most acute risks of flooding, severe weather, and dam failure through improved emergency communications, evacuation planning, and shelter capacity.

Goal 2: High Hazard Potential Dams

Assess vulnerabilities associated with high-hazard dams on the Connecticut and Deerfield Rivers and coordinate with dam operators to reduce downstream risk to Montague's critical facilities and residential areas.

Goal 3: Increase Capacity to Mitigate Risk

Strengthen the Town's administrative, regulatory, and financial tools to pursue smart growth, low-impact development, and sustained hazard mitigation investment.

Goal 4: Buildings and Infrastructure

Prioritize investments that harden essential public facilities against natural hazards, expand backup power availability, and advance green infrastructure to reduce stormwater impacts.

Goal 5: Natural Resources

Protect open spaces, farmland, wetlands, and waterways that provide critical natural flood storage, wildlife habitat, and community quality of life.

Goal 6: Education and Awareness

Improve community-wide resilience by ensuring residents have the information and resources they need to prepare for, respond to, and recover from natural disasters.

To achieve these goals, the HMPC prioritized 43 specific mitigation actions. The highest-priority actions include:

High-Priority Mitigation Actions

- Establish a solar PV micro-grid between Montague High School and the Public Safety Complex to provide reliable emergency backup power for critical operations during and after major storms
- Improve the Turners Falls Canal District by coordinating with property owners and FirstLight Power on redevelopment planning and structural integrity assessment of the power canal
- Secure funding to abate and demolish abandoned blighted mill properties — particularly the Strathmore Mill Complex — to eliminate hazardous material and structural collapse risks along the Connecticut River
- Map, assess, and replace undersized culverts to climate-resilient standards capable of handling increased precipitation volumes projected under future climate scenarios
- Implement MA DEP recommendations to address Combined Sewer Overflows (CSOs) and protect water quality during heavy rain events
- Review and update Emergency Action Plans for FERC-licensed hydroelectric dams on the Connecticut and Deerfield Rivers
- Conduct targeted emergency outreach to unhoused populations in river encampments who face particular risk from dam failure flooding
- Update the 2015 Community Wildfire Protection Plan and expand the Firewise program to the wildland-urban interface
- Improve emergency shelters and warming/cooling centers with backup generator and cooling capacity upgrades
- Prepare targeted communications plans for vulnerable residents with emergency preparedness information and resource referrals

PLAN IMPLEMENTATION & MAINTENANCE

To ensure the HMP remains an active, living document rather than a static compliance product, the HMPC has established a robust implementation and monitoring framework:

- The HMPC will meet bi-annually (January and July) to monitor progress, evaluate changing conditions, and update the plan as needed
- The Town Planning Director will serve as the primary implementation coordinator
- A Mitigation Action Tracker will document the status of all 43 prioritized actions
- Hazard mitigation principles will be integrated into the Town's Capital Improvement Plan and other key planning processes
- The plan will undergo full update and FEMA re-approval within five years

This ongoing commitment ensures that Montague's investment in hazard mitigation translates into measurable protection for residents, property, and the natural systems that sustain community life.

For more information, contact the Montague Planning Department

This plan was developed with support from Jamie Caplan Consulting LLC and in compliance with FEMA Local Mitigation Planning Requirements.